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[THE TIMELY SUCCOUR.]

## THE IMAGE IN THE HEART.

### A Christmas Story.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Dangerous Ground," "Heart's Content," "Sweet Eglantine," &c., &c.

#### CHAPTER VII.

How pleasant thy banks and green valleys below,  
Where wild in the woodlands the primroses blow.

Burns.

THE events that took place upon the discovery that Jaggars was in possession of the Image in the Heart did not make Mr. Edleston's household a very happy one.

Zoraide feared she knew not what. A dark suspicion haunted her mind, and she was afraid to give it shape.

Yet it pursued her in a shadowy, ungainly form, black, hideous, indistinct, and a voice seemed to whisper to her that her mother and her father had been privy to the abduction of Drummond Magendie's child. They had everything to gain by his disappearance. While he lived they could not hope to come into the property which they so much coveted, but if he were once out of the way the case became different. They were the only heirs, and stood a chance of inheriting a property without its equal in the county in which it was situated.

If her suspicions were correct her parents had been guilty of an atrocious crime, and she could not but blush to think that they had descended so low in the moral scale.

Her conscience was also perplexed, because she knew that it was wrong to keep possession of that which really belonged to another.

But she had not been brought up very strictly, and her religious principles did not impel her to go away from the beautiful house in which she lived and give up all the luxuries with which the late Mr. Magendie's wealth surrounded her.

She worried herself a little at first, but at length other matters occupied her mind, and, if a thought ever recurred to her of the lost child, the strange intruder of Christmas Eve, and the Image in the Heart, she tried to get rid of the uneasy feeling with which it inspired her as soon as possible.

Mr. and Mrs. Edleston were grave and preoccupied for some time, and held frequent conversations together in private, but they also grew cheerful as they heard nothing more of Jaggars, and thought that he was not able to perform as much as he had threatened.

Indeed, the task he had set himself was a hard one. To search for a tramp in a densely populated country like England is a difficult labour, requiring years for its performance, unless some lucky chance steps in and brings the searcher face to face with the person for whom he is seeking.

All they heard of Jaggars in two months was that he had quitted his employment at Mr. Gainford's without assigning any reason for it, and had gone away no one knowing whither.

That the man was at work neither Mr. Edleston nor his wife could doubt, and that he would do his utmost to find the child, prove his case, and dispossess them of their property, they firmly believed.

It was an unfortunate chance which enabled him to overhear the important conversation between Mrs. Edleston and her daughter, and it was equally unlucky that he should have obtained possession of the image in the crystal heart.

But after they had carefully considered the matter they were of opinion that they could afford to defy him, and might buy him off at the last moment, if he came to them with positive proof that he had found the missing child.

For both the husband and wife thought that the circumstantial evidence in favour of the man who had given Zoraide the heart being Mr. Magendie's lost son Leslie was very strong indeed.

However, they calmed their fears. Mr. Edleston became a Member of Parliament, and the family went to town for the season.

Zoraide now for the first time plunged into what is called the vortex of society. As is usual with people who become suddenly rich, the Edlestons cut all their former acquaintances, and cultivated the nobility and others whose position in the fashionable world was acknowledged.

The consequence was that party succeeded party, ball followed ball, kettledrums, fêtes, garden parties, and all that goes to make up the giddy whirl of aristocratic life in the London season was a part of Miss Edleston's existence.

Great was the admiration her beauty excited, and endless the numbers of suitors for her hand which her wealth brought her.

Related through her mother to an old county family, the daughter of an M.P. who boasted that he could and would give her one hundred thousand pounds on her marriage, superlatively lovely, graceful, and accomplished, is it at all wonderful that men struggled for an introduction to her, and that bets were made at the clubs as to who would carry off the heiress?

She was the belle of her season, but, strange to say, she did not meet with any one upon whom she could bestow her heart.

More than one coronet would have gladly been placed at her feet, yet she made no sign that such an accession of rank would be agreeable to her.

Her parents wondered at this, and she was questioned by her mother as to the cause of her indifference to manly beauty and the advantages which an alliance with a nobleman would give her.

"If you were well married, my dear," said her mother, "a great weight would be removed from your father's heart as well as mine. The distant but ever-present danger of an heir coming to claim our property in accordance with the provisions of your uncle's will would lose half its sting. You are young, but next season you will not be so fresh and attractive. A girl goes down each successive season. Now you have all London at your feet, and can pick and choose. Do not be too careless."

"I am not averse to marriage, far from it, mamma















































